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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [AC](#) [XL](#)  
SUBJECT: RSS CHAIRMAN AGREES TO PARTNERING WITH U.S.  
NATIONAL GUARD

REF: BRIDGETOWN 2411

Classified By: Ambassador Mary Kramer, for reasons 1.4 (a) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Kramer and the National Guard Bureau (NGB) Chief, Lt. General Blum, met February 3 with Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Spencer, acting in his capacity as Council Chairman of the Regional Security System (RSS), to pitch RSS participation in USSOUTHCOM's State Partnership Program (SPP). Spencer welcomed the USG proposal, a long awaited first step in formalizing cooperation in security and disaster management, especially in the run-up to the March 2007 Cricket World Cup (CWC). In a subsequent one-on-one with Ambassador Kramer, Spencer requested USG assistance in resolving ongoing issues with the RSS C26 program and an outstanding Export Import (EXIM) Bank loan issue. He also sought U.S. sponsorship for 25 scholarships to celebrate the country's 25th year of Independence on November 1, 2006. End Summary.

12. (C) Lt. General H. Steven Blum and Ambassador Kramer, accompanied by National Guard Bureau POLAD Dr. John Finney, USSOUTHCOM NGB Liaison Col. Wilfredo Colon, Bridgetown Military Liaison Officer CDR Peter Kilfoyle, and PolOff (notetaker), met with Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer, accompanied by PermSec Cora Richards and Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force (ABDF) Col. Croft in Antigua on February 3 to seek official support for the Eastern Caribbean's Regional Security System (RSS) to participate in USSOUTHCOM's State Partnership Program. The SPP provides training and exchange opportunities that could transition from military-to-military to military-to-civilian, and eventually to civilian-to-civilian programs.

13. (C) The Ambassador first presented PM Spencer with the Transportation Security Administration's confidential assessment of Antigua's international airport and the good news that 150 M-16 A4 assault rifles had recently been delivered to the ABDF through the Foreign Military Finance (FMF) program. (Note: PM Spencer had broached the rifle issue with the Ambassador in November (reftel). End note.). General Blum then described a brief history of the SPP and the related goals of the National Guard. He also provided regionally relevant examples of successful partnerships with the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Trinidad, and answered Spencer's queries.

14. (C) Not surprisingly, the Antiguan PM was keen to determine the extent of opportunities for bilateral training programs under the SPP. The General explained that entering the program under the umbrella of the RSS allowed for maximum

flexibility, including a bilateral training component, while avoiding country-specific restrictions such as those attached to states that have not yet signed Article 98 Agreements. The General acknowledged that RSS partner countries have differing interests, capabilities, and goals. He stressed that programs which address issues of regional importance such as disaster preparedness and the looming CWC would take precedence. PM Spencer approved participation in the SPP on behalf of the RSS, and MLO and the ABDF representative agreed to coordinate correspondence to make the transaction official.

#### Three Issues: One-On-One

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15. (C) Once General Blum's presentation had concluded, PM Spencer requested a one-on-one meeting with Ambassador Kramer (PolOff remained as notetaker) to discuss three areas of concern: continued funding for the C-26 aircraft, sponsorship of 25 anniversary scholarships, and a legacy loan from the EXIM Bank.

#### RSS Air Support

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16. (C) PM Spencer informed the Ambassador that the RSS was finalizing its strategic plan on how to move forward to acquire additional funding for the C-26 airborne maritime surveillance program. The Eastern Caribbean leaders are seeking financial support from the French, British and Dutch governments that also have an interest in maintaining the RSS C-26. The current RSS Chairman requested U.S. assistance in emphasizing to its European partners the importance of maintaining the regional surveillance program. He believes that if the U.S. were to make a case in support of the RSS through diplomatic channels, other donors would come on

board. Ambassador Kramer stated that those who favor a continuation of the C-26 program had new allies in Rear Admiral Jeffrey J. Hathaway of the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force (JIATF) South and in the unified position of the U.S. Ambassadors accredited to the region. The Ambassador advised that she could not yet promise anything but was continuing to press the issue (reftel).

#### Silver Anniversary Scholarships

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17. (SBU) The Prime Minister then asked the Ambassador to help find sponsors for 25 scholarships to U.S. institutions to be doled out as part of the country's 25th Anniversary of Independence to be celebrated November 1, 2006. The scholarships should be in areas critical to the development of Antigua and Barbuda, such as agriculture and issues related to the CARICOM's Single Market Economy (CSME). He agreed to send a letter outlining specific curricula GOAB wished to pursue. Again, the Ambassador made no promises other than to research some possibilities.

#### EXIM Loan - Bird Legacy

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18. (C) Finally, Spencer entreated the Ambassador to aid him in clearing up an old debt to the Export Import (EXIM) Bank left by the V.C. Bird administration (1981-1994). That administration had taken out a loan in the early 1980's to build the Deep Water Harbor in St. John's and then never repaid the loan. It was Bird's opinion (according to Spencer) that the USG had gotten a good deal on the air force military installation in Antigua, so the GOAB didn't need to repay. The current government now wants to upgrade the harbor to expand cruise ship capacity and improve cargo facilities, but needs to clear this loan before local financial institutions will consider a financial partnership. He was visibly uncomfortable at having to admit to the immensity of the GOAB's national debt, and candid about the many other challenges he faces trying to clean house, move forward and still meet the critical needs of his people. He asked if the Ambassador could request that EXIM review the loan and

consider some form of debt forgiveness. She agreed to look into the matter.

COMMENT

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19. (C) The overall tone of the meeting was collaborative and upbeat, with MLO taking the next steps to formalize and finalize the agreement for RSS to participate in the SPP. Post is encouraged by Spencer's enthusiasm for the project of partnering the Eastern Caribbean's Regional Security System with a state National Guard.

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